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IN THE

# Supreme Court of the United States

OCTOBER TERM, 1961

## No. 664

MRS. VIRGINIA KELLY, CURTIS MELANCON, HENRY MELANCON, JR., MRS. ELLA LOVIC and LYNN MELANCON,

Petitioners,

versus

HARTFORD ACCIDENT & INDEMNITY COMPANY,

Respondent.

OPPOSITION TO PETITIONER'S PETITION FOR WRIT OF CERTIORARI TO THE UNITED STATES COURT OF APPEALS FOR THE FIFTH CIRCUIT

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January 1962

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versus

HARTFORD ACCIDENT & INDEMNITY COMPANY,
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# OPPOSITION TO PETITIONERS' PETITION FOR WRIT OF CERTIORARI TO THE UNITED STATES COURT OF APPEALS FOR THE FIFTH CIRCUIT

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To the Supreme Court of the United States:

Respondent, Hartford Accident and Indemnity Company, opposes the petition for writ of certiorari to review the judgment of the United States Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit rendered herein and reported in 294 F. 2d 400 et seq. The judgment of the Court of Appeals affirms the judgment of the District Court for the Eastern District of Louisiana on defendant's motion to dismiss petitioners' action.

**Questions Presented by the Petition**

(1) Whether the Court of Appeals correctly interpreted Louisiana's Wrongful Death Statute;

(2) Whether there is any uncertainty in the law of Louisiana on the subject and, if so, whether the Court of Appeals should have postponed determination of this case against possible resolution by the State Supreme Court of any such uncertainty;

(3) Whether the Court of Appeals correctly held that the claims of these petitioners attain to the jurisdictional amount.

**Statutes Involved**

Title 28, United States Code Annotated, Section 1332, provides in part:

"(a) The district courts shall have original jurisdiction in all civil actions where the matter in controversy exceeds the sum or value of $10,000.00, exclusive of interest and costs, and is between —

"(1) citizens of different States. . ."

and Title 28, United States Code Annotated, Section 1441, provides in part:

"(a) Except as otherwise expressly provided by Act of Congress, any civil action brought in a state court of which the district courts of the United

> States have original jurisdiction, may be removed by the defendant or the defendants, to the district court of the United States for the district and division embracing the place where such action is pending."

Louisiana Revised Civil Code Article 2315, which was Louisiana's Wrongful Death Statute at the time this cause of action arose, provided in part:

> "Ever act whatever of man that causes damage to another, obliges him by whose fault it happened to repair it; the right of this action shall survive in case of death in favor of the children . . . or spouse of the deceased, or either of them, and in default of these in favor of the surviving father and mother or either of them, and in default of any of the above persons, then in favor of the surviving blood brothers and sisters, or either of them. . .
>
> "The survivors above mentioned may also recover the damages sustained by them by the death of the parent or child or husband or wife or brothers or sisters . . as the case may be."*

Louisiana Revised Statutes, Title 26:655 provides in part:

> "The injured person or his or her survivors or heirs hereinabove referred to at their option, shall have a right of direct action against the insurer within the terms and limits of the policy in the parish

*Reproduced in full in Appendix I, infra p. 12.

where the accident or injury occurred or in the parish where the insured or insurer is domiciled, and said action may be brought against the insurer alone or against both the insured and insurer jointly and in solido, at the domicile of either or their principal place of business in Louisiana."**

**Statement of the Case**

Petitioners are the brothers and sisters of Mrs. Lillian Melancon Adams, who was fatally injured in an automobile accident which occurred on January 15, 1959 in Lafourche Parish, Louisiana. Mrs. Adams was riding in the automobile owned and being driven by her husband, Andrew P. Adams, and petitioners contend that her death was caused by Adams' negligent operation of his automobile. Mrs. Adams died at the scene of the accident.

Invoking Louisiana's Direct Action Statute [Louisiana Revised Statute Title 28, 655, supra], petitioners on January 6, 1960 filed suit against respondent in Seventeenth Judicial District Court of Louisiana for the Parish of Lafourche, wherein the accident occurred, demanding damages for the injuries to and wrongful death of Mrs. Adams. On January 11, 1960 Andrew P. Adams, decedent's surviving spouse, filed suit against respondent and State Farm Mutual Automobile Insurance Company, in Twenty-Fourth Judicial District Court of Louisiana for the Parish of Jefferson, plaintiff's domicile, demanding damages from respondent as his insurance carrier for the injuries to and death of Mrs. Adams. Pursuant to Title 28 United States Code 1441, re-

**Reproduced in full in Appendix II, infra p. 14.

sponden. timely removed petitioners' suit from Seventeenth Judicial District Court to United States District Court for the Eastern District of Louisiana (Tr. 2-8). Petitioners filed no motion to remand nor did they otherwise contest the removal of their suit from the Seventeenth Judicial District Court of Louisiana to United States District Court for the Eastern District of Louisiana.

Respondent filed motion to dismiss petitioners' complaint and, after argument, District Judge Wright granted the motion. On appeal the Court of Appeals, Fifth Circuit, affirmed, 294 F. 2d 400, with Circuit Judge Cameron dissenting, 294 F. 2d 403, and rehearing was refused with per curiam, 294 F. 2d 409.

**Petitioners' Contentions**

Petitioners contend that the Court of Appeals erred in holding that Louisiana's Wrongful Death Statute grants the right of recovery to the surviving spouse, if one there be, to the exclusion of secondary beneficiaries and petitioners contend that the Court of Appeals incorrectly defined the terms of the statute, particularly, the meaning of the words "in default of" as used therein. Petitioners further contend that the Court of Appeals erred in overruling their motion to remand to State Court, first raised on rehearing in the Court of Appeals. On those contentions, petitioners seek writ of certiorari in this court.

**Argument**

May it please the Court:

This private litigation presents no weighty issues of national importance to consume this court's time in interpreting state statutes and adjudicating on state law. Petitioners assign as one reason why writ should be granted the claim that Louisiana law is confused on the issues here present. Petitioners made that argument in the Court of Appeals and, as appears from his dissenting opinion, Circuit Judge Cameron agreed that Louisiana law was made unsettled by the decision of the Louisiana Court of Appeal, Third Circuit, in *Dumas* v. *United States Fidelity & Guaranty Company*, 125 So. 2d 12. Whether or not the law of Louisiana was made unsettled by the Louisiana Court of Appeal's opinion in the Dumas case aforesaid, is now unimportant for the Supreme Court of Louisiana on certiorari to the Louisiana Court of Appeal, Third Circuit, in the Dumas case, specifically reversed that appellate court and has set the issue at rest. *John Stanley Dumas* v. *United States Fidelity & Guaranty Company*, 134 So. 2d 45 [not yet reported in State Reports]. In overruling the Court of Appeal for the Third Circuit, the Supreme Court of Louisiana has specifically held that where a decedent is survived by a spouse, the secondary beneficiaries cannot assert claim for injuries to and death of the decedent even in circumstances where the surviving spouse is, himself, the wrongdoer and as such cannot recover for the injuries suffered by decedent. So factually analogous is the Dumas case to the case at bar that the decision of the Supreme Court of Louisiana is, in fact, dispositive of the issues here presented. Of course, the Court of Appeals in affirming the dismissal of this case

anticipated the decision of the Supreme Court of Louisiana in the Dumas case and not without authority. The judgment of the Court of Appeals herein on the merits of the case rests on the opinion of the Louisiana Court of Appeal for the Second Circuit in *Goodwin* v. *El Dorado Baking Company*, 31 So. 2d 230. In the Dumas case the Supreme Court of Louisiana specifically affirms the decision of the Louisiana Court of Appeal in the Goodwin case. There is no uncertainty in the law of Louisiana on the question under consideration.

But it is said by petitioners that since the plaintiff in the Goodwin case was an adult child of the decedent, the decision in that case is not applicable to the case at bar. The same might be said of the Dumas case wherein one of the plaintiffs was the adult daughter of the decedent. Of course, the distinction is without difference but, lest the argument be made that the law of Louisiana is still in confusion, reference is made to the amendment of Louisiana Revised Civil Code Article 2315 by Act 30 of the Louisiana Legislature of 1960. If there were any doubt of the intention of the legislature when it enacted Article 2315 and employed the words "in default of", in the text noted on page 3, supra, that doubt is forever laid to rest by the amendment of 1960, which reads as follows:

> "Every act whatever of man that causes damage to another obliges him by whose fault it happened to repair it.
>
> "The right to recover damages to property caused by an offense or quasi offense is a property right which, on the death of the obligee, is inherited by

his legal, instituted, or irregular heirs, subject to the community rights of the surviving spouse.

"The right to recover all other damages caused by an offense or quasi offense, if the injured person dies, shall survive for a period of one year from the death of the deceased in favor of: (1) the surviving spouse and child or children of the deceased, or either such spouse or such child or children; (2) the surviving father and mother of the deceased, or either of them, if he left no spouse or child surviving; and (3) the surviving brothers and sisters of the deceased, or any of them, if he left no spouse, child, or parent surviving. The survivors in whose favor this right of action survives may also recover the damages which they sustained through the wrongful death of the deceased. A right to recover damages under the provisions of this paragraph is a property right which, on the death of the survivor in whose favor the right of action survived, is inherited by his legal, instituted, or irregular heirs, whether suit has been instituted thereon by the survivor or not.

"As used in this article the words 'child', 'brother', 'sister', 'father' and 'mother' include a child, brother, sister, father, and mother, by adoption, respectively."

The legislature of 1960 by employing the words used in the amendment is expressing the public policy of Louisiana as clearly as though it had said that the words "in default

of these", as they are used in the earlier amendments to Article 2315 mean "if he left no spouse or child surviving."

Resolution of the jurisdictional question first raised by petitioners in their petition for rehearing in the Court of Appeals also depends on interpretation of Louisiana law. There can be no question of the correctness of the Federal law on the subject as it is set forth in the Court of Appeals' per curiam refusing rehearing (294 F. 2d 409). In their petition in this court petitioners allege that the claim of each petitioner is separate and distinct and cannot be considered collectively. Such is not the law of Louisiana. The Court of Appeals correctly held that a single right of action resulted from the death of Mrs. Adams. In addition to *Reed* v. *Warren*, 172 La. 1082, 136 So. 59, cited by the Court of Appeal the following cases support that proposition:

*Norton* v. *Crescent City Ice Co.*, 178 La. 135, 150 So. 855, 857:

> "As we have heretofore shown, this court decided in Reed v. Warren that only a single tort is created where death is caused by the fault of another, namely, the killing of one person, and that only one cause of action arises for the damages occasioned thereby."

*Riggin* v. *Watson-Aron Ice Cream Co.*, 192 La. 469, 188 So. 144, 146; *Dellert* v. *Continental Land & Fur Co.*, 196 La. 701, 200 So. 9; *Pierce* v. *Robertson*, 190 La. 377, 182 So. 544, 545; *Board of Commissioners* v. *City of New Orleans*, 223 La. 199, 65 So. 2d 313, 316; *Thompson* v. *Travelers Ins. Co.* [La. App.] 182 So. 356, 361; *Thornton* v. *Peak* [La. App.]

191 So. 182, 184; *Burthlong* v. *Huber* [La. App.] 4 So. 2d 480, 482, holding:

> "In the case of Reed v. Warren . . . the Supreme Court with Chief Justice O'Niell as its organ exhaustively reviewed the history of this codal article from the date of its original enactment. In that case the court decided that only a single tort is created where death is caused by the fault of another, namely the killing of one person, and that only one cause of action arises for the loss or damages occasioned thereby."

*Ott* v. *Grace* [La. App.] 13 So. 2d 138, 140; *Wolfson* v. *Succession of Lisso* [La. App.] 13 So. 2d 521, 523; *Thompson* v. *Kivitt & Reel* [La. App.] 25 So. 2d 124, 126; *Walker* v. *Geddes* [La. App.] 33 So. 2d 570, 574; *Harris* v. *Lumbermen's Mutual Cas. Co.* [La. App.] 48 So. 2d 728, 730; and *Gabriel* v. *United Theatres, Inc.* [La. App.] 50 So. 2d 514, 516. Since all petitioners sought to assert in State Court but one cause of action the amount in controversy is the sum of their several claims for the one tort and the jurisdictional amount is present.

**Conclusion**

The Court of Appeals has correctly held that the existence of decedent's surviving husband precludes the assertion of any judicial demands by petitioners. The Court of Appeals has correctly held that under Louisiana law only one cause of action results from the death of a human being and, consequently, that the collective interests of petitioners exceed the jurisdictional amount.

The writ of certiorari should be denied.

Respectfully submitted,

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Attorney for Respondent

**Proof of Service**

I, Stanley E. Loeb, attorney for respondent and a member of the Bar of the Supreme Court of the United States, hereby certify that on this day I served a copy of the foregoing brief in opposition to Petition for Writ of Certiorari on

Raymond H. Kierr, Esquire
1740 National Bank of Commerce Building
New Orleans 12, Louisiana

by mailing same, United States postage prepaid, addressed as hereinabove set forth.

New Orleans, Louisiana, January , 1962.

Stanley E. Loeb

## APPENDIX I

Louisiana Revised Civil Code Article 2315
Prior to Amendment by Act of 1960

Art. 2315. Every act whatever of man that causes damage to another, obliges him by whose fault it happened to repair it; the right of this action shall survive in case of death in favor of the children, including adopted children and children given in adoption, or spouse of the deceased, or either of them, and in default of these in favor of the surviving father and mother, or either of them, and in default of any of the above persons, then in favor of the surviving blood brothers and sisters, or either of them, for the space of one year from the death. However, should the deceased leave a surviving spouse, together with minor children, the right of action shall accrue to both the surviving spouse and the minor children. The right of action shall accrue to the major children only in those cases where there is no surviving spouse or minor child or children.

If the above right of action exists in favor of an adopted person, it shall survive in case of death in favor of the children or spouse of the deceased, or either of them, and in default of these in favor of the surviving adoptive parents, or either of them, for the space of one year from the death. However, this right of action shall survive in favor of the blood parent or parents to the exclusion of the adoptive parent or parents when at the time of the adoption the adopted was a major, or emancipated minor whose adoption was affected without the consent of the blood parent or parents evidenced in the act of adoption. In default of these,

it shall survive in favor of the surviving blood brothers and sisters of the adopted person, or either of them, for the space of one year from the death.

The survivors above mentioned may also recover the damages sustained by them by the death of the parent or child or husband or wife or brothers or sisters, or adoptive parent, or parents, or adopted person, as the case may be. (As amended by Acts 1948, No. 333, §1).

## APPENDIX II

Louisiana Revised Statutes Title 22:655

No policy or contract of liability insurance shall be issued or delivered in this state, unless it contains provisions to the effect that the insolvency or bankruptcy of the insured shall not release the insurer from the payment of damages for injuries sustained or loss occasioned during the existence of the policy, and any judgment which may be rendered against the insured for which the insurer is liable which shall have become executory, shall be deemed prima facie evidence of the insolvency of the insured, and an action against the insurer may thereafter be maintained within the terms and limits of the policy by the injured person, or his or her survivors or heirs mentioned in Revised Civil Code Article 2315. The injured person or his or her survivors or heirs hereinabove referred to at their option, shall have a right of direct action against the insurer within the terms and limits of the policy in the parish where the accident or injury occurred or in the parish where the insured or insurer is domiciled, and said action may be brought against the insurer alone or against both the insured and insurer jointly and in solido, at the domicile of either or their principal place of business in Louisiana. This right of direct action shall exist whether the policy of insurance sued upon was written or delivered in the state of Louisiana or not and whether or not such policy contains a provision forbidding such direct action, provided the accident or injury occurred within the state of Louisiana. Nothing contained in this Section shall be construed to affect the provisions of the policy or contract if the same are not in violation of the laws of this state. It is the intent of this Sec-

tion that any action brought hereunder shall be subject to all of the lawful conditions of the policy or contract and the defenses which could be urged by the insurer to a direct action brought by the insured, provided the terms and conditions of such policy or contracts are not in violation of the laws of this state.

It is also the intent of this Section that all liability policies within their terms and limits are executed for the benefit of all injured persons, his or her survivors or heirs, to whom the insured is liable; and that it is the purpose of all liability policies to give protection and coverage to all insureds, whether they are named insureds or additional insureds under the omnibus clause, for any legal liability said insured may have as or for a tort feasor within the terms and limits of said policy. (Amended and reenacted Acts 1958, No. 125.)

## APPENDIX III

UNITED STATES COURT OF APPEALS
FOR THE FIFTH CIRCUIT

No. 18455

MRS. VIRGINIA KELLY, CURTIS MELANCON, HENRY MELANCON, JR., MRS. ELLA LOVIG and LYNN MELANCON,

Appellants,

versus

HARTFORD ACCIDENT & INDEMNITY COMPANY,

Appellee.

Appeal from the United States District Court for the Eastern District of Louisiana.

(August 16, 1961)

Before RIVES, CAMERON and JONES, Circuit Judges.

RIVES, Circuit Judge: This appeal is from a judgment sustaining the defendant's motion to dismiss the plaintiffs' action for the wrongful death of Mrs. Lillian Melancon Adams. The complaint alleged that on January 15, 1959, Mrs. Adams was a guest passenger in an automobile operated by her husband, Andrew P. Adams; that "the automobile was caused to be in collision with a truck, when the automobile went into the opposite and oncoming traffic lane"; that Mrs. Adams' husband "negligently failed to keep a proper lookout ahead, to maintain his automobile under proper control, to stay in his own traffic lane, and to otherwise operate the automobile in such a manner as

to have avoided the collision"; and that "as a result of the collision Mrs. Lillian Melancon Adams sustained severe personal injuries which were fatal to her."

The plaintiffs are the brothers and sisters of Mrs. Adams. She is survived also by her husband, but not by any descendants or ascendants. The action in brought, pursuant to Louisiana Revised Statutes of 1950, 22:655, directly against the liability insurer of Mrs. Adams' husband. The defendant moved to dismiss the action on the ground that the plaintiffs are without right to bring this action under the law of Louisiana. Attached to the motion to dismiss is an affidavit of one of defendant's attorneys to the effect that the husband, Andrew P. Adams, has filed suit against the defendant in a Louisiana State court for the wrongful death of his wife, asserting the identical cause of action being asserted by her brothers and sisters, except that damages are demanded on behalf of the husband.[1]

The district court, without opinion, granted the defendant's motion and dismissed the action. This appeal from that decision turns upon the construction of the Louisiana wrongful death statute as it existed at the time of decedent's death,[2] in part as follows:

> "*Art. 2315. Liability for acts causing damage: survival of action*

---

[1]We are informed by the appellants that the state trial court dismissed the husband's action against his insurer for his wife's death, basing its decision on the case of Addison v. Employers Mutual Liability Insurance Co. of Wisconsin, La. App. 1953, 64 So. 2d 484, discussed later in this opinion, and that an appeal has been taken from said dismissal

[2]The statute was amended by Acts 1960, No. 30, §1.

"Art. 2315. Every act whatever of man that causes damage to another, obliges him by whose fault it happened to repair it; the right of this action shall survive in case of death in favor of the children, including adopted children and children given in adoption, or spouse of the deceased, or either of them, and in default of these in favor of the surviving father and mother or either of them, and in default of any of the above persons, then in favor of the surviving blood brothers and sisters, or either of them, for the space of one year from the death. However, should the deceased leave a surviving spouse, together with minor children, the right of action shall accrue to both the surviving spouse and the minor children. The right of action shall accrue to the major children only in those cases where there is no surviving spouse or minor child or children.

* * * *

"The survivors above mentioned may also recover the damages sustained by them by the death of the parent or child or husband or wife or brothers or sisters or adoptive parent, or parents, or adopted person, as the case may be." L.S.A. C.C., Art. 2315.

The appellants suggest that decision on appeal of the husband's action in the state court proceeding should be awaited. The present appeal was submitted on December 1, 1960, more than eight months ago, and we think that its decision should not be longer delayed, inasmuch as

the majority of this Court agree with the district court that, irrespective of whether or not the husband is ultimately held to have a right to sue his insurer, the decedent's brothers and sisters are without right to bring this action under the law of Louisiana.

In *Dowell, Inc. v. Jowers*, 1948, 166 F. 2d 214, 219, this Court, with Judge Lee, a distinguished Louisiana lawyer and judge, as its organ, construed the Louisiana wrongful death statute as follows:

> "A careful reading of the parts set forth above and of Louisiana case law on the subject shows that under the article two causes of action are given to the named beneficiaries, one the survived action, i.e., the action which the deceased had at the time of death; the other an action given by the Code to the named beneficiaries in their own right for the damages they suffer by reason of the death of their decedent. Eichorn v. New Orleans & C. R. Light & Power Co., 112 La. 236, 36 So. 335, 104 Am. St. Rep. 437; Reed v. Warren, 172 La. 1082, 136 So. 59; Voss, 'The Recovery of Damages for Wrongful Death,' etc., 1931, 6 Tulane L. R. 201 et seq."

The appellee questions whether that construction is really in accord with the decision of the Supreme Court of Louisiana in *Reed v. Warren*, 1931, 172 La. 1082, 136 So. 59. The construction asserted in *Dowell , Inc. v. Jowers, supra*, has not been authoritatively corrected by the Louisiana state courts, and the appellants insist that it is correct. See also 16 Tulane L. Rev. 409, 413 n. 190. We agree with the

appellants to that extent, but we think that the brothers and sisters neither succeed to the decedent's claim for her own injury nor have any independent right to damages such as loss of affection, etc. suffered by reason of the death of their sister.

That the brothers and sisters do not succeed to the decedent's claim for her own injury would appear to be settled by the decision in *Addison v. Employers Mutual Liability Insurance Co. of Wisconsin*, La. App., 1953, 64 So. 2d 484. In that case, Mrs. Addison sued her husband's liability insurer for injuries allegedly resulting from her husband's negligence and, while her suit was pending, Mrs. Addison died. Her children who were all majors were made parties plaintiff in place of the deceased. Despite the fact that the husband was the alleged tort feasor, the appellate court held that "exception was properly taken" to the substitution of the children as parties plaintiff, and that the husband "succeeds to her claim and stands in her shoes." The husband was denied recovery because "the obligation was extinguished by confusion when plaintiff's wife died and he succeeded to her rights."

As to any independent right of the brothers and sisters to damages such as grief, loss of affection, etc. suffered by reason of the death of their sister, the general rule of construction has been thus stated:

> "But time and time again our courts have reiterated the definite principle that *the right* of action for damages for the death of a human being is in derogation of a common right and cannot be extended by implication to other surviving relations

than those to whom it is expressly granted by statute."

*Goodwin v. El Dorado Baking Co., La.* App. 2d Cir., 1947, 31 So. 2d 230, 232, 233.

In that case it was held that an insane daughter above the age of majority had no right of action for her mother's death where the decedent was also survived by her husband. The decision of that case was made easier by the plain language of the last sentence of the first paragraph of Article 2315, *supra*, which was quoted by the Court with emphasis: "*The right of action shall accrue to the major children only in those cases where there is no surviving spouse or minor child or children.*"

Here the appellants argue that the earlier expression, "in default of any of the above persons," is more ambiguous, and should be construed to mean "in event of non-recovery" by the earlier ranking beneficiaries. To support that argument, the appellants rely not on the decisions, but on law review articles simply stating the opinions of the authors as to a rule or interpretation which would be "more just." 6 Tulane L. Rev. 201, 236; 16 Tulane L. Rev. 386, 412. The adoption of a "more just" State law is not a matter for the consideration of a federal court, but is appropriately addressed to the State legislature.[3]

The rule of strict construction asserted in *Goodwin v. El Dorado Baking Co., supra*, by which we are bound under

[3]Indeed, some of the suggestions in the Law Review articles may have been adopted by the 1960 Amendment referred to in footnote 2, supra.

the Erie doctrine, forbids us so to extend the right of recovery under the statute. "In default of" is used synonymously with "where there is no" as that phrase appears in the last sentence of the first paragraph of Article 2315, *supra*, heretofore quoted. That use reinforces our view that the ordinary and natural meaning of the phrase "in default of" appears to be "in the absence of," and that it was so employed in Article 2315.

It seems clear to us that, Mrs. Adams having left a surviving husband, her brothers and sisters neither succeeded to her claim for her own injury, nor were granted any independent right of action for grief, loss of affection, or other damages suffered by reason of the death of their sister. The judgment is therefore

AFFIRMED.

---

CAMERON, Circuit Judge, Dissenting:

I.

This action was disposed of by the court below upon a motion to dismiss.[1] The sole legally recognized ground upon which the motion to dismiss was based was that provided by Rule 12 (b) (6): "Failure to state a claim upon which relief can be granted." This action was brought under the Louisiana Wrongful Death Statute,[2] the open-

---

[1] "On motion of defendant to dismiss, it is ordered that this motion be, and the same is hereby, granted, and case is dismissed."

[2] 9 LSA Civil Code §2315.

ing sentence of which is: "Every act whatever of man that causes damage to another, obliges him by whose fault it happens to repair it . . . " The complaint alleged that the act which caused the death of Mrs. Lillian Melancon Adams happened by the fault of her husband Andrew P. Adams.[III] The complaint also alleged that appellants here are the only persons surviving having a legal right of action to assert the survival and wrongful death claim.[IV]

The action was brought against Hartford Accident & Indemnity Company, which, under the allegations of the complaint, "had in full force and effect a policy of insurance providing liability insurance coverage covering the automobile, its operator, the guests therein, and the parties and subject matter of this petition, and, as such, the said defendant insurance company is directly liable to petitioners pursuant to Louisiana Revised Statutes of 1950,

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[III] "On January 15, 1959, petitioners' decedent, Mrs. Lillian Melancon, late wife of Andrew P. Adams, was a guest passenger in the automobile operated by her said husband . . .

"At the said time and place the automobile was caused to be in collision with a truck, when the automobile went into the opposite and oncoming traffic lane; . . .

"The operator of the said automobile negligently failed to keep a proper lookout ahead, to maintain his automobile under proper control, to stay in his own traffic lane, and to otherwise operate the automobile in such a manner as to have avoided the collision.

"As a result of the collision Mrs. Lillian Melancon Adams sustained severe personal injuries which were fatal to her . . ."

[IV] "Petitioners are the brothers and sisters of decedent; and she is not survived by any descendents or ascendents; . . .

"The decedent's claim for personal injuries and death survive in favor of petitioners, who, as her brothers and sisters, are the only persons having a legal right of action to assert the survival and wrongful death claims resulting from the negligence of decedent's husband;

"Petitioners itemize their claims for damage for the pain and suffering of decedent, the economic value of her life, and petitioners' loss of affection, companionship and assistance . . ."

22:655.[v] The policy was not before the court below so that its terms were not considered by it in passing on the motion to dismiss.

Professor Moore states the function of such a motion to dismiss in these words: "The motion to dismiss under Rule 12 (b) (6) performs substantially the same function as the old common law general demurrer . . . For the purpose of the motion, the well pleaded material allegations of the complaint are taken as admitted . . ."[vi]

It appearing, therefore, from the complaint that Mrs. Lillian Melancon Adams was killed by the fault of Andrew P. Adams, that the appellee had in effect a policy of insurance which under Louisiana law covered the fatal injuries and damages sued for, and that the claim for personal injuries and death of the decedent survived in favor of appellants' and that these averments are admitted by the motion to dismiss, it seems clear to me that the court below committed plain error in granting said motion.

II.

The inexorable result thus ensuing was sought by ap-

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[v]Which reads in part as follows:

"It is also the intent of this section that all liability policies within their terms and limits are executed for the benefit of all injured persons, his or her survivors or heirs, to whom the insured is liable; and that it is the purpose of all liability policies to give protection and coverage to all insureds, whether they are named insureds or additional insureds under the omnibus clause, for any legal liability said insured may have as or for a tort feasor within the terms and limits of said policy."

[vi]2 Moore's Federal Practice, 2d Ed., p. 2244; Hydro-Carbon Production Co., Inc. v. Valley Acres Water District, et al., 5 Cir., 1953, 204 F. 2d 212, 16; and Olan Mills, Inc. of Tennessee v. Enterprise Pub. Co. et al, 5 Cir., 1954, 210 F. 2d 895, 897.

pellee to be avoided by the expedient of adding to the language of Rule 12 (b) (6) F.R.C.P. above quoted the statement. " . . . in that the plaintiffs in this suit are without right to bring this action under the law of Louisiana." This averment of the motion to dismiss was supported by the affidavit of the attorney for appellee informing the court that he was representing appellee in a State Court suit brought by Andrew P. Adams demanding damages for the injury to and death of his wife.[vii] The effect of this affidavit is to make it appear that such a suit had been brought and that the attorney appearing in this action was defending that suit. It is difficult to perceive that the affidavit establishes *as a fact* what the attorney says were the contentions of the parties to that suit. The record contains no further information about the suit.

Nothing in the affidavit purports to challenge the allegations of the complaint that Mrs. Adams was killed by the fault of her husband and that the policy of the appellee was in effect and created the liability quoted from the Louisiana Statute, supra. At most, the affidavit can be interpreted only as a sort of lefthanded denial of the allegations of the

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[vii] " . . . that, on behalf of Hartford Accident and Indemnity Company, appearer, in his capacity as attorney at law, is defending a suit pending in the Twenty-fourth Judicial Court for the Parish of Jefferson, entitled 'Andrew P. Adams v. Hartford Accident and Indemnity Company and State Farm Mutual Automobile Insurance Company,' being No. 54-138 of the docket of said Court; that said suit is brought by Andrew P. Adams, the husband of Lillian Stella Melancon, deceased, demanding damages as a result of the death of his wife caused by injuries sustained in an automobile accident occurring on January 15, 1959 in the vicinity of Mathews, Louisiana, and is the identical cause of action being asserted by the brothers and sisters of decedent Lillian Stella Melancon in this suit except that damages are demanded on behalf of the husband."

complaint that the claim of Mrs. Adams' injury and death survived in favor of the appellants and that they were the only persons having a legal right to action to assert the survival and wrongful death claim. Assuming that the affidavit is sufficient to raise an issue as to this material fact, the action should have been handed as pending before the court below upon motion for summary judgment.[viii]

Neither the appellee nor the court below handled the matter as one pending upon motion for summary judgment, and appellants were never called upon to proceed as provided by Rule 56. If they had been called upon to answer a motion for summary judgment, they would have had the benefit of taking depositions, calling for admissions, and utilizing the other procedures provided by Rule 56. If given the opportunity, they might have developed that they could discover a means by which this disjointed action might have been put back together. The parties are proceeding here under the dilemma of being faced with this action, which was removed to the court below by the appellee, and the State Court action brought in by the affidavits attached to appellee's motion to dismiss. Appellee chose to litigate half of the claim against it in a State Court of Louisiana and the other half in the Federal Court. It has the right to insist that all parties be made parties to one suit. *Reed v. Warren*, S. Ct., La., 1931, 136 So. 59, 62.

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[viii] Rule 12 (b) F R C P

". . . If, on a motion asserting the defense numbered (6) to dismiss for failure of the pleading to state a claim upon which relief can be granted, matters outside the pleading are presented to and not excluded by the court, the motion shall be treated as one for summary judgment and disposed of as provided in Rule 56, and all parties shall be given reasonable opportunity to present all material made pertinent to such a motion by Rule 56."

At all events, the course taken by appellee has resulted in nothing more favorable to it than the raising of an issue of fact between the allegations of appellants' complaint that they are the sole beneficiaries under the Louisiana Statute, and the assertion that a person, the attorney assumed to be the husband of the decedent, had instituted a suit in a Louisiana Court claiming that he, as the husband, was owner of part of the claim for her wrongful death. It seems clear to me that such an issue cannot be settled under a motion to dismiss, and if the court below had proceeded, as I think it should have, under Rule 56 F.R.C.P., it would have been faced with an issue of fact calling for a jury trial or, in any event, not susceptible of handling under summary judgment procedures.

III.

Assuming, however, that the foregoing considerations are invalid and that there was presented to the court below only a question of law, based upon the assumption that the husband has survived and is asserting his action for his wrongful killing of his wife, I will proceed to a discussion of some of the Louisiana cases on the quetsion of whether his mere survival will defeat the right of appellants to recover altogether. It is appellants' position that, since there is no one in existence in any class ahead of them except the husband, and since this action is based upon his negligence as the sole cause of her death — a matter not disputed in any way in this record — the claim for the wrongful injury to and death of Mrs. Adams succeeds to them under the Louisiana Lord Campbell's Act quoted in the majority opinion. Both parties agreed that there is no Louisiana case directly sustaining the contentions of

either of them on the point;[ix] nor have I been able to find any Louisiana decision which seems directly controlling. The course of decision in Louisiana, under Article 2315 of the Civil Code, has certainly been attended by travail and is not free from what appears to me to be conflict and confusion.

Appellants take the position that the Louisiana statute states categorically: "Every act whatever of man that causes damage to another, brings him by whose fault it happened to repair it." They contend that the residue of the statute concerns itself solely with a definition of rights as between the different classes of those who may enforce the cause of action thus unequivocally given.[x]

Forgetting for a moment the tortuous course of construction the statute has taken, it seems that the definition of the meaning of the crucial word "default" should be simple.[xi] From this definition it is clear that the word

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[ix]Appellants state in their brief, "There is no reported Louisiana case precisely in point;" and appellee comes back with the assertion that, "We have been unable to find a Louisiana case where the collateral relatives had the temerity to assert a cause of action which survived to the husband under the plain provisions of Article 2315 of the Louisiana Civil Code."

[x]The parties agree that there are three classes of survivors: class one, minor children and spouse; class two, father and mother; and class three, blood brothers and sisters; and that appellants belong to class three, and that no children or parents survived the decedent.

[xi]Webster's New World Dictionary of the American Language, College Edition, page 384, defines "default" thus: "1. failure to do something or be somewhere when required; . . . 2. failure to pay money due. 3. failure to appear in court to defend or prosecute a case. v.i. 1. to fail to do something or be somewhere when required. 2. to fail to make payment when due. 3. to fail to appear in court. 4. to fail to take part in or finish a contest. 5. to lose by default. v.t. 1. to fail to do or pay . . . 2. to fail to take part in or finish . . . 3. to lose . . . by default; forfeit."

means fundamentally "to fail." It would follow logically that, if the members of class one failed to assert the right given them, those of the second class would be invested with the power to assert the right; and so on through the classes.

The courts of Louisiana certainly seemed, in the earlier cases, to give the word quite a different meaning and to interpret it as having the signification of "in the absence of a person of higher class." The case of *Kerner et al v. Trans-Mississippi R. Co. et al.*, 1925, 104 So. 740, is one of the most cited cases. It held that, in that case, the surviving mother of an injured man alone acquired a right of action for damages as the result of his death; that she had the absolute right to dispose of the claim, and it added as dictum that, even if she had announced that she abandoned the right of action, or that she would allow it to prescribe, it would not have given a right of action to the surviving brother and sisters of the deceased.

But this decision has been criticised by law writers, as evidenced by an article in 6 Tulane Law Review by Voss saying, at page 236:

> "It would be more just to interpret 'in default' to mean merely 'in event of non-recovery' by the first ranking beneficiary, so that a mere failure, for any reason, on the part of the first ranking beneficiary to exercise his right of action, would not bar the recovery of damages by the beneficiaries next in line under the provisions of Article 2315. This could not do violence to the legislative intent, since the fact that the more remote

beneficiaries are specifically named in the Article is conclusive evidence that they were intended to be benefitted when the immediate beneficiaries were not.[xii]

Listed under the 1960 Amendment of Article 2315 are thirty-six law review articles showing how the treatment of the statute by the courts has evoked discussion by law writers.

It is noteworthy that the annotator of the Louisiana Code states under the 1960 amendment[xiii] that such landmarks as *Kerner* supra, and *Chivers v. Roger,* 1898, 23 So. 100, and the cases following those cases have been rejected by the 1960 amendment, and refers to a number of other changes liberalizing its application as among the several classes.

Appellants claim that the husband, undisputed possessor of the claim for his wife's death as a class one claimant under the statute, is under the disability of being the tort feasor whose negligence was the sole proximate cause of her death; and that the statutory right to recover therefor never vested in him, because the law destroyed it before it was born.

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[xii]Appellants point out, too, that this article is given convincing force by the fact that it was cited with approval by Judge Lee, a Louisiana lawyer and judge of long experience, speaking for the Court in Dowell, Inc. v. Jowers, et al, 1948, 166 F. 2d 214, certiorari denied, 68 S. Ct. 1346. The entire article should be read if one is to acquire an insight into the varied constructions put upon this statute by Louisiana Courts.

[xiii]LSA Civil Code, Volume 9, 1960, Pocket Parts, pp. 5-6.

Appellee and the majority rely heavily upon the decision of the Court of Appeal of Louisiana, First Circuit, 1953, in *Addison, et al v. Employers Mutual Liability Insurance Co. of Wisconsin*, 64 So. 2d 483, as coming close to the position asserted by appellee here. Cleo E. Addison had sued her husband's insurer because of negligent injuries inflicted on her by him. Before the exception of no cause of action filed by the insurance company could be acted upon, Mrs. Addison died, and her children, all majors, were made parties plaintiff in place of the deceased. When the insurance company complained of this, the husband filed a motion to be made plaintiff in place of Mrs. Addison on the ground that his wife's right of action accrued to him. To this position, the insurance company also excepted. The trial court sustained the exception of no cause of action, and the husband appealed to the Court of Appeal, which affirmed. Its opinion quoted approvingly from other Louisiana cases holding that the insurance company would not be liable in any case in which the insured himself would not have been liable. The court emphasized that Mrs. Addison did have a cause of action against the husband, but that she could not enforce it. It held, arguendo, that theoretically she could enforce her cause of action aginst her husband by bringing a suit against his insurer and recovering from it any amount which her husband was obligated to pay her but for the defense of coverture, which the insurer could not invoke.

The court concluded, however, that the husband, Mr. Addison, could not maintain the suit against his insurer, because he could not sue himself. This, the court thought, resulted from the provisions of Article 2217 of LSA Civil Code, which provided that when the assured became not

only the debtor but the creditor as well, no matter by what process he became the creditor, there arose a confusion of rights which extinguished the obligation. Its holding was, therefore, that the obligation existing initially in favor of Mrs. Addison had become extinguished by confusion when her husband, the tort feasor, succeeded to her rights.[xiv]

Appellants contend that the cases last discussed are overruled by the case of *Dumas, Appellant-Appellee v. United States Fidelity & Guaranty Co., Appellee-Appellant,* Ct. App. La., 3 Cir., 1960, 125 So. 2d 12. John Dumas was injured December 15, 1960 while riding in a car driven by his wife, and he brought suit for damages against her liability insurer. The insurance company stipulated, when the case was called for trial, that Mrs. Dumas was guilty of actionable negligence. Before the trial was completed John Dumas died of natural causes. His widow, a major daughter by a former marriage, and the executor of his estate filed a joint motion asking that all three be substituted as parties plaintiff and be permitted to continue the prosecution of the suit. The trial judge ruled that the executor alone, and not the widow or daughter, was entitled to be substituted as a party plaintiff, and awarded the executor total damages of $12,996.99, including medical expenses, loss of earnings and general damages.

The trial judge characterized his task as one of "resolving the perplexing legal problems" created by the "difficulty of reconciling the jurisprudence of our Supreme

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[xiv]And cf. Young v. McCullium et al., Ct. App. La., 1 Cir., 1954, 74 So. 2d 339; and Perot et al v. United States Casualty Co. et al., Ct. App. La., 2 Cir, 1957, 98 So. 2d 583.

Court and our Courts of Appeal interpreting Code of Practice, Article 21, as amended, with reference to the abatement of actions, and LSA-C.C. Article 2315 concerning tort actions and the survival thereof."

In amending the judgment entered by the trial court the Court of Appeal used this language, which may be characterized as epitomizing its holding (125 So. 2d at p. 19):

> " . . . We further hold that the District Court was in error in denying the motion of the surviving widow, Mrs. Alice Peters Dumas, to be substituted as party plaintiff, and we conclude that she is the only proper party plaintiff in these proceedings . . . .
>
> "This is the action of John Stanley Dumas to recover damages for suffering, disability, medical expenses and loss of earnings. The case stands or falls on his entitlement to damages and not on the entitlement of the substituted party plaintiff. . . .
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> "We, therefore, are of the opinion that although Mrs. Dumas was guilty of contributory negligence proximately causing the accident, she is not thereby barred from recovery as a substituted party plaintiff in these proceedings."

This decision, which seems to be the last one decided by a Louisiana appellate court, seems to repudiate much of the *Addison* decision, although it would seem to strength-

on the claim of the husband here to be substituted to any claims his wife might have had against him — and the record fails to show whether she did have such claims or not — as distinguished from the claims of any beneficiaries under the statute.

Under the unsettled state of the Louisiana law on the subject and, as the parties admit, there being no precedent to guide us,[xv] I am not in favor of turning these appellants away when it appears clear that the husband never became vested with any right to sue for any damages accruing to himself, for his negligent killing of his wife, as a beneficiary under the wrongful death statute. I do not believe that justice or any holding of a Louisiana Court in recent years would give support to such a course.

The court below denied appellants' motion to postpone action in this case until the husband's suit in the Louisiana Court has concluded its journey through the appellate courts of Louisiana. It is entrely possible that, by the action and holdings of those courts, some light will be shed on the proper course we ought to pursue in this case. At all events, I think the case should be sent back to the district court that it may await the outcome of the case pending in the State Court, and then proceed more in consonance with the requirements of Federal rules, which, in my judgment, are those outlined above. I think justice requires no

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[xv] Whether it is technically applicable or not, Article 21 of 1 LSA Civil Code seems to suggest a course of action which might well be followed here:

"In all civil matters, where there is no express law, the judge is bound to proceed and decide according to equity. To decide equitably, an appeal is to be made to natural law and reason, or received usages, where positive law is silent."

less, and I respectfully dissent from the affirmance of the judgment of the lower court.

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## ON PETITION FOR REHEARING

Before RIVES, CAMERON and JONES, Circuit Judges.

PER CURIAM: Relying on the well-settled principle that federal jurisdiction cannot be conferred by consent and may be questioned at any time, the appellant on petition for rehearing insists for the first time that the action was not removable under 28 United States Code § 1441 and § 1332, because the matter in controversy did not exceed the sum or value of $10,000.00, exclusive of interest and costs. The complaint on behalf of the five brothers and sisters of Mrs. Adams alleged in Paragraph 1 that defendant "is justly and truly indebted unto petitioners in the full sum of $50,000.00, together with legal interest thereon from date of judicial demand until paid." The appellants rely upon the itemization of that amount in Paragraph 9. "Petitioners itemize their claims for damages for the pain and suffering of decedent, the economic value of her life, and petitioners' loss of affection, companionship and assistance at the sum of $10,000.00 to each of petitioners, totaling $50,000.00."

Professor Moore refers to the following as the classic statement of the rule:

> "The settled rule is that when two or more plaintiffs having separate and distinct demands

> unite in a single suit, it is essential that the demand of each be of the requisite jurisdictional amount; but when several plaintiffs unite to enforce a single title or right in which they have a common and undivided interest, it is enough if their interests collectively equal the jurisdictional amount."

*Pinel v. Pinel*, 1916, 240 U. S. 594, 596. See 1 Moore's Federal Practice, Paragraph 0.97 [3], p. 891.

This case comes within the latter class since the five plaintiffs seek to enforce a single right of action for the wrongful death of their sister. Art. 2315, La. Civil Code; *Reed v. Warren*, 1931, 172 La. 1082, 136 So. 59; *Texas & Pacific Ry. Co. v. Gentry*, 1896, 163 U. S. 353, 360, 361. The petition for rehearing is therefore

DENIED.